DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 398 HE 024 455

AUTHOR Ermler, Kathy; Kovar, Susan
TITLE Qualitative Evaluation in Higher Education.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Evaluation Methods; *Evaluative Thinking; Higher Education; *Participative Decision Making; *Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

Qualitative evaluation can be used to facilitate change in the immediate higher education professional environment. This evaluation method enriches the collection and interpretation of data by involving all groups and persons who have a share in the problem. In contrast to qualitative research, qualitative evaluation assists in situation-specific decision-making and attempts to involve all individuals and groups associated with the problem in all phases of data collection and interpretation. A model for qualitative evaluation used by Guba and Lincoln consists of nine steps: (1) identify the problem (any individual or member of a group can identify a problem); (2) identify shareholders (identify all who are associated with or could be effected by the issue); (3) focus responsively (generating alternative problem statements); (4) prioritize questions, concerns, and issues (group representatives together discuss the questions generated in Step 3); (5) identify information and identify criteria (deciding what data to collect, choosing criteria to evaluate the data); (6) collect data (data collection not be limited to a single instrument, method or person/group); (7) present information and prepare agenda for negotiation (each group prepares an agenda concerning their preferred solution); (8) negotiate solutions (group representatives together arrive at a compromise solution); and (9) develop report or written action plan. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED331398

Qualitative Evaluation in Higher Education

Qualitative evaluation is a process that goes beyond 'getting the facts' through qualitative collection and interpretation of data. The collection and interpretation of data is 'enriched' by involving all the human, political, social, cultural and contextual elements of a situation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). These elements are drawn into the process by using qualitative research methods for data collection and by involving all groups and persons who have a 'share' in the problem. These groups or individuals are known as shareholders because they have a vested interest in the outcome or will be effected by the outcome a project.*

Qualitative evaluation differs from qualitative research in two ways.

1. When a person has questions about the environment in general, then qualitative research should be utilized. However, when a person has a question which is specific to his/her own environment, then qualitative evaluation should be used. Qualitative research facilitates the generalizations of research findings to various environments while qualitative evaluation assists in situation-specific decision-making.

*Shareholders is a modification of the term **Stakeholders** which was used by Guba and Lincoln (1989).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kathy Ermler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Kathy Ermler
Susan Kovar

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

2. Qualitative research limits the input and the interpretation to select individuals or groups. Qualitative evaluation attempts to involve all individuals and groups associated with the problem or concern in all phases of data collection and interpretation.

The focus of this paper is to explain how qualitative evaluation can be utilized to facilitate change in the immediate professional environment. The following model of qualitative evaluation is an adaptation of a model used by Guba and Lincoln (1989). Figure 1 illustrates the nine steps which are involved in this qualitative evaluation model.

Step 1: Identify the Problem

In this model any individual or group can identify a concern or problem that they would like to address through the use of this method. This method does not advocate the "top-down" problem identification; i.e., chief administrators do not 'give' a problem to the people working for them. For the purpose of this paper, assume that a faculty member wants to address the following issue; How can I get my students to increase discussion in class?

Step 2: Identify Shareholders

Once an issue is raised, it becomes necessary to identify all constituent groups who are associated with or could be effected by the decisions made concerning this issue. These groups become shareholders and work independently of and, in conjunction with, the other groups

in order to resolve the issue. The faculty member must identify all persons who are associated with his/her concern about class discussion. While there may be many shareholders involved with this problem, for the sake of simplicity, let us assume that there are three groups of shareholders; the students, the faculty and the administrators.

Step 3: Responsive Focusing

After all shareholders are identified, they are asked to refine the initial problem. The shareholders are asked to put aside the common assumption that they already know that the problem is, and in so doing, they are asked to generate alternative problem statements. This generation of alternative questions is crucial in order not to preclude any possibilities and not to precondition the mind to accept a narrow range of acceptable solutions to that problem.

Since the initial problem was "How can I get my students to increase class discussion?", the shareholders attempt to create questions related to this initial problem. For example, the student shareholders may come up with a list of questions similar to:

1. How can class be made more varied?
2. How can class be made more relevant?
3. How can we have more input into course content?

The faculty shareholders may come up with a list of questions similar to:

1. How can students become active agents in the educational process?
2. How can we create an environment in which students feel confident and comfortable enough to talk?
3. How can we structure assignments to increase students' interest?

The administrator shareholders may come up with a list of questions similar to:

1. How can we offer a variety of experiences with limited personnel and funding?
2. How can we bring in more guest speakers in classes?
3. How can we reschedule faculty?

Step 4: Prioritize Questions, Concerns, and Issues

It is important to remember that all input from shareholders must receive equal weighting and consideration; i.e., the input from students must be given the same priority as the input from faculty. The groups prioritize their list of questions and then representatives from each group join together and discuss all of the questions which were generated from their individual groups. The

combined group would examine the questions in an attempt to determine:

1. What's the question about which ideas are most needed?
2. If some questions address similar themes or concerns?
3. If there is a 'common strand' among the questions?
4. On what questions should we start working?
5. What questions suggest the most useful directions?

In our example, the faculty/student/administrator group may decide that the student's #3 question (How can we have more input in the course content?) and the faculty's #1 question (How can students become more active agents in the educational process?) are essentially addressing the same issue. Similarly, the faculty's #3 question (How can we structure assignments to increase student interest?) and the student's #2 question (How can class be made more relevant?) are similar. The group should look for common, overlapping concerns. Additionally, the group should select issue(s) which serve **all** the shareholders and not just one 'select' group. With some discussion and debating the group arrives at one question to consider. The group in this example decides to combine a question from the student's list with a question from the faculty's and the administrators' list. The problem they chose to consider is "How can the learning environment be structured to be more interesting and relevant?"

Step 5: Identify Information and Identify Criteria

After the issue has been refined and selected, two other decisions need to be made by the entire group of shareholders. The first decision relates to the type of data to be collected. Based on the chosen problem, information to be collected which would be useful in addressing this issue may include such things as:

1. What class topics do students think are irrelevant?
2. How much money is available to bring in guest speakers?
3. What topics do other university professors include in this type of course?
4. What teaching methods do the students believe assist in their learning of class material?
5. What techniques are available to make certain topics more interesting to students?

The second decision which the entire group needs to make focuses on the selection of criteria by which the data can be evaluated. The criteria helps the group determine which ideas are truly promising and which ones are weak.

To return to the example, once the group has decided on the ways in which data will be collected, they need to select criteria to evaluate these data. The criteria which the group might select, in this example, include:

1. Time to implement idea or time to complete task
2. Cost
3. Availability of personnel, facilities and equipment

Step 6: Collect Data

The groups are asked to assist in the data collection through participate observation and through other research methods used in conjunction with participate observation. Whatever methods are used proper research procedures need to be followed when collecting this data. For example if interviews are to be done, then a structured interview process must be constructed. If a representative group is to be used, instead of all group members, then proper sampling procedures need to be followed. It should be remember that the means to collect data should not be limited to a single instrument, method or person/group. In this example, the data which is to be collected includes:

1. Interviews with students and faculty from various classes.
2. Surveys of physical education majors from other college campuses.
3. Brainstorming sessions by shareholder groups.
4. Observations of faculty from other university.

Step 7: Present Information and Prepare Agenda for Negotiation

After all the data has been gathered, the independent groups of shareholders review data and then make some decisions about the data using the criteria as a guide. Each group of shareholders prepares an "agenda" or develops

a plan which includes the group's preferred solution to the issue. It is essential that the data be superimposed on the criteria and that all groups review the data. Students will, in all probability, interpret the information much differently than faculty or administrators. This difference in interpretation will lead the groups to find very different and workable solutions to the problem.

Step 8: Negotiate Solutions, Concerns and Issues

The next step in this qualitative evaluation process involves bringing shareholding group representatives back together in order to develop a mutually agreeable plan which would address the issue. The groups are not trying to convince each other of the 'rightness' of one group's solution over the other but are attempting to work out a compromise. The compromise should incorporate the best ideas from all shareholders.

Step 9: Develop Report or Written Action Plan

The report is distributed to all shareholders and contains three things:

1. The action or actions to be taken to resolve the issue.
2. The time frame to accomplish this action.
3. The person or persons who are responsible for completing the tasks.

Conclusion

A man who, after a night of overindulging, attempted to unlock his front door. But as luck would have it, just as he had the key to the lock, the keys slipped from his hand, hit the steps and fell beneath the stairs. The man stumbled down the stairs and went out to the street and began searching for his keys. A passerby stopped and asked the man what he was doing. "I dropped my key and I can't find them." The passerby offered his assistance and asked the man approximately where he dropped the keys. "Under the stairs by my front porch." Amazed that the man was seeking his keys out by the street, he asked, "Why are looking for your keys out here?" The man looked at the passerby and said, "because the lights better out here?"

How unlike this man with the lost keys are we in our search for solutions to our problems? We typically search in the same ways and use the same methods because the "light is better there." The use of the qualitative evaluation process is an alternative method to seek and to find workable solutions which address the concerns of all people who are influenced by the problem.

References

Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1989) Fourth Generation Evaluation. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

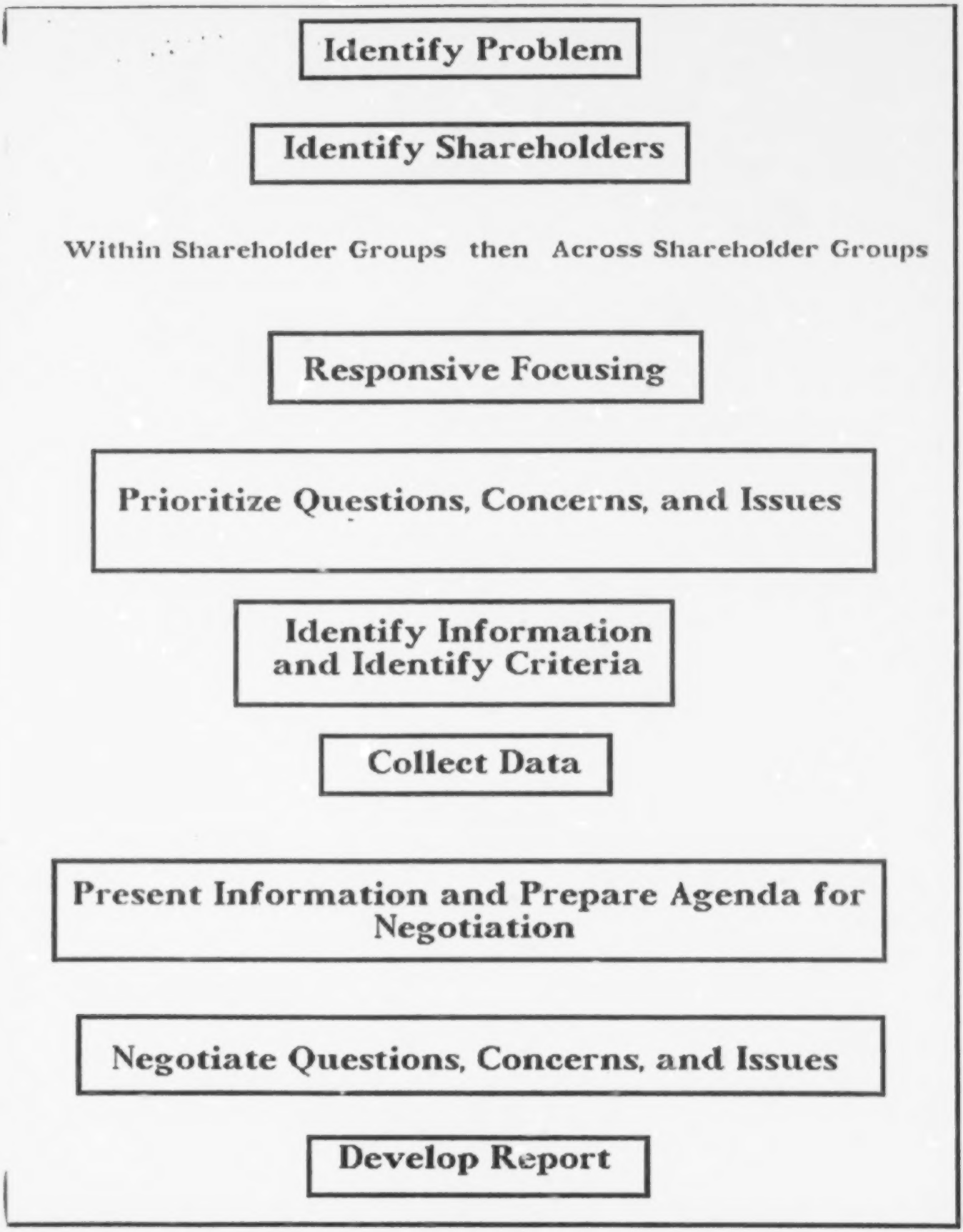
Identify Problem
Identify Shareholders
Within Shareholder Groups then Across Shareholder Groups
Responsive Focusing
Prioritize Questions, Concerns, and Issues
Identify Information and Identify Criteria
Collect Data
Present Information and Prepare Agenda for Negotiation
Negotiate Questions, Concerns, and Issues
Develop Report

FIGURE 1